

# SUZUKI PIANO BASICS FOUNDATION NEWS

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To facilitate, promote, and educate the public on the way of teaching and playing the piano taught at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan by Dr. Haruko Kataoka.

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## LISTEN

**By Dr. Haruko Kataoka**

If you want to study music, you must first listen to music.

For example, if you want to play a certain piece on the piano, the smart thing to do would be to sit in front of the piano without looking at the score and listen to the piece on a recording from morning to night. Then try playing the piece with the music after having listened to it for a day, two days, a month, or even a year. You will be surprised how easily you will learn the piece. Of course, it would be impossible for someone without any knowledge of the technique of playing the piano to play something difficult by Chopin or Liszt perfectly, but it would not be impossible to play simple portions of the beautiful melodies within the piece.

Listening is an extremely difficult task, is it not? There is no problem when we concentrate and want to hear something or when we are listening to relax, but when we are listening to the same piece throughout the day there will be times when we get tired of it or we feel that it is just a nuisance. I have had such experiences.

How is it that this kind of listening can become a nuisance? It is because we are trying to listen. If we do not actively try to listen, it is possible to play the recording all the time without getting tired of it. We tend to define listening as just one thing, but there are many different ways of listening. Please ponder the following passage by Confucius:

*Do not listen with the ears but listen  
with the heart.*

*No, do not listen with the heart but listen  
with the spirit.*

*To listen only with the ears will create awareness just  
within the heart.*

*However, the spirit is unattached so that everything  
exists there.*

The left side of the brain is not fully developed in children, so that when a recording is constantly played softly they listen with the spirit, and thereby may hear it completely and fully master the music. Their mother tongue which they hear from birth is heard by their spirit in the same manner, so that all children master their own language without complaining that it is a nuisance or that it is boring. Not once do they think that they are trying to learn.

An American child, Lindsay, who recently attended the workshop in Bellingham, Washington, showed this to all of us.

She was a cute little girl of seven. During the lesson she played *Christmas Day Secrets* from Book 1 very well, so I asked, "Can you play a little more advanced piece?" Her father replied, "I have been busy, so we have not had the time to practice."

So I asked, "How much do you listen to the recording each day?" The response was marvelous: "Twenty-four hours. This is what you always tell us, isn't it? That is why we play the recording softly in our home 24 hours a day."

As I was thinking to myself that even though she did not practice that much she was able to play so well because of all this listening, Lindsay said, "I memorized this piece." Even though it was only with the right hand, she played the third movement from the Clementi *Sonatina* in Book 3 extremely well. The tempo and rhythm were excellent.

Hearing this, the fifty or so teachers who were observing the lesson were astounded. After all, she was only in the process of studying Book 1.

Childhood, when we can listen openly with our spirit, is truly a wonderful time. We adults can only be envious.

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Translated by Rev. Ken Fujimoto and edited by Karen Hagberg*

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## SENSEI, THANK YOU!

*It is with great respect and deep appreciation that we thank you for continuing to help us. Year after year, leaving your own students behind, you come to America, to willingly share your knowledge and experience with everyone.*

*Thank you for your patience. Thank you for not giving up on us. It is because of our perseverance and your persistence that we are beginning to understand Dr. Suzuki's dream that "Every child can grow beautifully." This concept acquires a deeper meaning each time we study with you.*

*With each lesson that you teach and with each work that you speak, whether you exude a feeling of anguish and despair or excitement and enthusiasm, there is always a sense of hope and prayer in your voice.*

*We appreciate your traveling such a long distance to help since many of us cannot go to Matsumoto. It is our hope that 100% of the Piano Basics Foundation membership will choose to study with you at an upcoming summer workshop so that the dream can take on a deeper meaning.*

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## FROM A MOTHER'S HEART

**By Anne Klink**

I became aware of the Suzuki Method for piano many years ago when I saw a television program featuring very young Suzuki students playing at unbelievably advanced levels from memory. At that time, I thought that the children must have been browbeaten to achieve such high levels of proficiency. Nonetheless, I remained intrigued by what I saw, and when I set out to find a piano teacher for my daughter, I wanted to find out more about this method.

I called a number of traditional teachers first, inquired about their methods and asked what they knew about the Suzuki Method. Interestingly, none of them were aware of the Suzuki Method. Then I called Rita Burns, our current teacher. She explained that the method was based on how children learn language: that listening to music and learning to discern tone, rhythm, dynamics, and other qualities of music first were more important than learning to read music early on: and that developing the fine motor skills to make a beautiful sound was the goal.

Her thoughtful explanation made so much sense to me--I was sold--I had an *intellectual* grasp of the pedagogical principles. And although Rita discussed the role of the parent-as-coach, it was harder to understand the full meaning of her words. Resistance to practice, she said, is natural. The parent had to be prepared.... truer words I never heard!

At first, my daughter glided through her lessons and practices, listening to the music and easily duplicating the sound, just like her teacher said, as easily as she learned her primary tongue.

As we progressed, I became impressed with the thoughtful integration of the music repertoire, put together to build on previous skills while balancing the level of difficulty so that the student could maintain confidence while finding some pieces more challenging than others.

Then right around the end of our first year or so, we "hit the wall" for the first time, and I was so thankful that I had been prepared by our teacher, guest clinician Karen Hagberg, other parents, and articles in this newsletter. Their words were important to remember, for now it was becoming my test as a parent to understand the Suzuki Method *with my heart!*

Over the years, as I observed my daughter and her Suzuki peers, I realized that the pedagogical principles of Suzuki are elegant. And like the most profound ideas, they are simple. But like anything really worth achieving, they require commitment.

***"...For now it was becoming my test as a parent to understand the Suzuki Method with my heart!"***

Watching these children develop a love of music and taking advantage of the many supportive opportunities for parents, has really made my commitment grow deep.

I thank all of you teachers for your devotion to the advancement of the Suzuki Method, and I especially thank Dr. Kataoka for making so many arduous trips to the United States to share her gifts with all of us.

Anne Klink is a Suzuki mom in Sacramento, California.  
The preceding remarks were made at a reception for Dr. Kataoka on August 20, 1997.

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**To teach the arts to children is nothing less than to be charged with their destiny." (*Sensibility and Education*, Dr. Haruko Kataoka)**

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## LOUISVILLE MUSINGS

### Thoughts after attending Dr. Kataoka's Workshop in Kentucky, June 1997

**By Renee Eckis**

Flying across the country to see old friends and make new ones... coming home to ponder what I had learned. Hmm... It's the first time I hear. ..(but not the first time Dr. Kataoka said.) Every time I see Dr. Kataoka, hear a little deeper. As we change and develop, we see how much more we can change. But the basics are always the same, and the most basic of the basics is BALANCE.

I am trying more deeply to understand the analogy with the way a baby learns to walk. Because walking is a physical skill, just as playing the piano, the analogy is easy to apply. When we were just learning to walk, we held on to something. Many beginning piano students, unable to keep their balance, hold onto the piano. If they learn balance at the keyboard, however, they may "walk" or play smoothly, with ease. If they do not achieve good balance, their gait is always uneven, like someone who walks with a limp.

If we let children practice walking and celebrate their ability to keep balance, they will progress to higher levels. At each of these levels, such as with running, dancing, bicycle riding, cross-country skiing, etc., balance must again be achieved. We may think of the Bach *Italian Concerto* as being comparable to rollerblading in this regard. The necessary sense of balance is identical. The consequence of losing balance is also identical. The injuries may not be as obvious in the pianist, but are often much deeper. My bruise from rollerblading was only 6" in diameter. The resulting fear of falling was a bit more serious and difficult to heal. The stumble in the *Italian Concerto* may not hurt physically but can cause lasting wounds if it happens in a public performance.

In sports and in piano performance, some "falling" is expected in the process of learning. But if the falls occur when competing before friends and critics, there may be lasting emotional damage. The rollerblader may take to the sidelines, wishing to be more capable, and the pianist may choose never to perform again. In either case, balance in all aspects of one's life is necessary to overcome such feelings of inadequacy.

To have balance on rollerblades, one must first have balance walking. The beginnings are the most important. As a child develops, the balance must always be checked and corrected, so that the child may keep the balance, the center, as he or she plays.

Our job as teachers is to demonstrate balance by our own example. Perhaps balance should be considered another of our senses, along with sight, touch, hearing, etc. If we can live with balance, practice with balance, and teach with a balance of love and strictness, we can help to change the world.

Assignment: Practice left-hand: do-sol-mi-sol with a quiet thumb.

Goal: Italian Concerto

*Renee Eckis is a Piano Basics teacher in Pasco, Washington.*

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Thanks to a dedicated Suzuki dad in Greenville, North Carolina, ***Piano Basics Foundation News*** and Dr. Kataoka's book, ***How to Teach Beginners***, are now on-line at the PBF web site, <http://www1.ecu.edu/~hiwilbur/suzuki.htm>. This past summer, Dr. Ken Wilburn, Assistant Professor at East Carolina University, offered to create a web site for Piano Basics Foundation. From its inception in March, all 1996 bimonthly issues of the *PBF News* are now on-line, and 1997 issues will be added soon. Our web site exists primarily in a text-based format, which means that it contains few images.

***Piano Basics Foundation wishes to thank Dr. Wilburn for his valuable contribution which will continue to make our published materials accessible to everyone.***

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## GRADUATING FROM MATSUMOTO AND MOVING TO GERMANY

By David Williams

After graduating from the Talent Education Institute in the summer of 1995, I returned to Germany, where I had worked for many years previous to my stay in Japan. I located a job as a rehearsal pianist at the State Theater in Braunschweig. The Theater is actually an opera house, housing also a ballet company and an acting company. There is a full symphony orchestra. Last summer, I met three American women who were looking for a piano teacher. Thus began my humble start, post graduation, as a Suzuki teacher.

The German Suzuki Association is very small. There are about 30 violinists, 4 cellists, 2 guitarists and 6 pianists in the group. The teachers are trained to various levels. There are no piano teacher trainers in Germany.

When my colleagues in the Theater found out I was a Suzuki teacher, the reaction was negative. Mozart, Bach and Beethoven are regarded as sacred, national treasures. Typically, there is little understanding here of Suzuki Method, and much misinformation regarding reading, group instruction, and listening.

Even with the strong tradition here in fine music making and the existence of well-conceived systems such as Kindermusik, few have considered Dr. Suzuki's logical observation that children learn to speak before they learn to read their mother tongue. Listening is regarded as a shortcut, some kind of cheating. The child's wonderful ability to imitate is discouraged, with much more importance given to the intellectual activity of note reading.

Our art is aural. Should we discourage students from listening? Would a teacher of psychology not encourage students to read Freud? Every field has its role models. If our role models are Horowitz, de Larrocha, Gould, et.al., we should

be listening to them.

In our own field of Suzuki Piano Method, we should be familiar with the works of Dr. Suzuki and Dr. Kataoka. We have been provided with these strong role models, whose dedication and spirit shine as beacons in this still- young and dynamic Method.

It is said that Suzuki Method started with a few students and one violin, which was shared for practice and lessons. Yet out of this humble beginning, Dr. Suzuki created dazzling success, not only with his students, but with the many teachers who have received training over the years. Perhaps it was his belief that all children can learn to play with noble spirit that created the structure for a global organization which continues to grow.

My students are learning more quickly now. I would like to publicly thank Dr. Kataoka for her training. At times I felt it was severe when she would tell me to practice something 10,000 times. But the will to master something carries a seed for success: endlessly...challenge, mastery, accomplishment in a continuous spiral.

Moving into the next century, we are inundated with gigabytes of information. Out of the din of electronics, you might hear someone playing the piano. You stop and listen. You smile and say, "Gosh, isn't the piano beautiful!"

*David Williams, formerly of Dallas, Texas now resides in Germany*

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## **MEDIA CORNER**

**By Bruce Boiney**

*I adore art...when I am alone with my notes, my heart pounds and the tears stream from my eyes, and my emotion and joy are too much to bear.*

One can easily appreciate that this heartfelt sentiment belongs to the great operatic composer, Giuseppe Verdi. His music is as powerful as are his words! I think we can all relate to Verdi. Have we not all known profound times when we have been moved to tears of joy by the beauty of the music we are hearing or playing?

Opera is great medium for moving us at this soul level. On the other hand (be honest, now) don't you sometimes relate to Debussy, who once said, *In opera, there is always too much singing*. Perhaps the singer is trying a little too hard, or we are just in the mood for something with a little less pathos!

Both the Verdi and Debussy quotes are courtesy of a great little volume entitled *The Music Lover's Quotation Book* (Sound & Vision, 118 pp., \$9.95). The quotations are compiled by Kathleen Kimball, Robin Peterson, and Kathleen Johnson. They are conveniently arranged into subjects such as composers, conductors, pianists, and politics. In the back are one-line biographies of everyone who is quoted.

I came across the book in a store while on vacation last year and have since found it to be enjoyable reading and a great resource for newsletters and teaching.

Readers of this book will now be able to give credit where it properly belongs. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, for example, would appreciate getting credit occasionally for having penned the now widely popular phrase: *Music is the universal language of mankind*.

We see a different facet of history when we read that the third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, once called music *the favorite passion of my soul*. By the way, to put things in a new perspective, Jefferson died in 1826, the year before Beethoven, who would undoubtedly have professed the same favorite passion. I think I would have remembered my U.S. history dates more easily this way!!

You may even pick up some tips from this book that will save you money. Oscar Levant (actor, screenwriter, composer, pianist) was apparently unsuccessful in talking his way out of a speeding ticket with the following excuse;

*You Can't possibly hear the last movement of Beethoven's 7th and go slow.*

The Suzuki community will be happy to know that Dr. Suzuki is represented as well with one of everyone's favorites:  
*Knowledge is not skill, knowledge plus 10,000 times is skill.*

There are many more quotes, so pick up your own copy and enjoy.

*Bruce Boiney is a Piano Basics teacher in Louisville, Kentucky.*

*Media Corner* is a new, regular feature in *Piano Basics Foundation News*. Do you have a favorite CD, video or music-related book or computer program that you would like to share with others? Please submit your "review" for future issues.

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